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An Inaugural Dissertation on the Pulse, submitted to the examination of
The Trustees and Medical Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania for the degree of Doctor of Medicine by Archibald B. Deal of Alexandria — April 12 1808 —

In an attempt to prove, the fallacy of the pulse, as a guide, in the treatment of certain diseases, I should do injustice to the talents and zeal, of the professor of the Institutes and practice of Med. in this University, were I not to acknowledge my belief, that it is the great centinel of the system; that other symptoms may often be uncertain, and are generally useful, only, when taken collectively. The introduction of the antiphlogistic plan of treatment of some diseases by Sydenham, may be considered as forming one of the most important eras in the progress of the healing art. Too, tho' not suggested by any great principles univer-

sally applicable to disease; it has contributed to lay the foundation of a theory of medicine that elevates the profession to the dignity of a science.

But important as an attention to the state of the pulse is in the treatment of disease, it will not I think be difficult to prove that it sometimes invites to the adoption of mischievous and even fatal practice. It is an evil, often, attending the acquisition, of any good, that, other minor sources, of usefulness and information, which, we have long been in possession of, should sustain a diminution of value. And if the sanguine expectations of mankind often dispose them to overvalue a new discovery in philosophy or the arts, may we not suppose that a

benevolent disposition would be more
apt to overrate an improvement in a
science which has for its object
the health and happiness of the hu=
man race — Sublata causa tollitur
effectus had once its reign as a med=
ical axiom; but when supplanted by
new principles, an indiscriminate ap=
plication of the latter has often de=
prived us of much benefit that might
have been derived from an attention
to the former. I shall therefore en=
deavour to prove first that the state
of the pulse has been too much relied
on, to the exclusion of a regard to
the cause of disease. The success
of Dr White's practice in puerperal fe=
ver, remarkably exemplifies the ad=

vantages resulting from a removal of the exciting cause without much attention to the state of the pulse. Great quickness of pulse was a distinguishing symptom, accompanied sometimes, especially, in the commencement with some tension. But believing that the usual cause of this disease was a retention of the lochia and faces become acid from constipation; and knowing that the prophylaxis consisted in avoiding these and a hot regimen ~~(together with an observance of temperance)~~ he concluded that a continuance of the action of these internal irritating causes must prolong and aggravate the fever. The removal of these, together with remedies calculated to excite gentle sw=

superficial action constitutes the means that insures a happy termination of the complaint. Bloodletting when indicated by excitement in the pulse the relieved vessels have been destructive to the patient, already scarcely possessed of strength enough to exhibit the phenomena of life.

Bleeding says Dr I ewman if indicated or repeated by the inflammatory appearance of the blood will generally hasten the death of the patient by diminishing strength faster than it can abate disease — So fatal indeed was the use of the Lancet in this fever within the observation of Levret that he declared he never saw a patient survive the ope-

cation. The symptom of pain accompanying fever is thought often to justify the employment of bloodletting. When a primary symptom and the effect of great action evacuating remedies are no doubt proper; but it is often the effect of such a weak degree of morbid action, that adds to a debilitated state of the whole system, depletion in any way would be injurious; and it will frequently continue by habit in spite of all other remedies, yielding only to the use of opium, a medicine so useful in exciting new action.

Pain [illegible] Tumour referring to the dis[illegible] of which I have been

speaking should be relieved by the use of opium without hesitation at any period of the disease when it is violent; for tho' it be originally a consequence of the disease, it becomes ere a time a powerful cause of its continuance and increase. Altho' improvements in the management of lying in women have rendered puerperal fever much less common now than formerly, on which account when it does occur its inflammatory nature may require a free use of the depleting plan; still it is sufficient for my purpose to have shewn, that the lancet when

ished in obedience to the demands of the pulse, has been not only prejudicial but frequently fatal — The false effects of the amist in a disease vulgarly called inflammatory, and which assumes some variety of a character can have escaped the notice of but few physicians. But often as it has occurred to their observation, the difficulty of managing it has frequently perplexed them, and sometimes almost led them in the confusion of anxiety and alarm to commit the suffering patient to the feeble and uncertain operations of nature — The symptoms are such as

to seem to require a free use of depleting remedies and the consciousness of their ~~effects~~ exhibition, that of prostrating the patient beyond the power of the physician to recover him — A history by Dr Langham of an epidemic which prevailed in Delaware 1801, affords some idea of the difficulty of treating certain diseases according to the state of the pulse and other symptoms of high morbid action. For the sake of perspicuity I shall give a case which he has published. "An active robust man aged 26 indisposed by a slight catarrh was attacked with a chill at a

fox chase; during the chill he drank freely of cold water and vomited incessantly. Fever succeeded and about an hour from its commencement I saw him; he had a frequent dry cough oppression and pain of the breast and head, pulse full and rather tense, and in fact the symptoms of pneumonia complete — I opened a vein and drew xii ℥ blood, gave an effervescent mixture to check the vomiting and afterwards an antimonial febrifuge to promote perspiration — At 9 P.M. he was much relieved and inclined to sleep. On the 11 at 7 ~~P.M.~~ A.M. saw

him again at 6 P.M. my astonish=
ment found him quite exhaust=
ed, his pulse feeble extremities
cold and of a leaden hue; lips
and tongue covered with a
dark scurf and fissured, his
eyes of a glassy appearance
and pupils somewhat dila=
ted, with typhomania. Blisters
were applied and cardiacs; but
he died comatose at 4 P.M."
There are few perhaps who
will not be disposed to at=
tribute the sudden death of
the patient in this case to the
loss of blood which he sus=
tained. The practice was such
as prevailing theory and gene=

val analogy justified; yet it was unsuccessful under the direction of an eminent physician, who was so alarmed at the consequences of bloodletting, that he was at a loss when to prescribe and when to omit it. Dr Barton also speaks of an epidemic in which the state of the pulse and symptoms of pain were such as to induce an adoption of the antiphlogistic plan. Death was the melancholy issue of every case thus treated, and a resort to the bark was as successful as a different practice had been before stated — So true is the remark of Alibert that symp=

toms of disease are often incompatible with the remedies which seem necessary for their removal — The frequency of jaundice, dropsy and some other diseases, succeeding intermitting and remitting fevers, has been adduced as proof that the lancet is often improperly withheld. As disease does not always appear in the same nosological shape an inattention to the changing state of the system may sometimes have been productive of these disagreeable effects. But if it be feeble theory to say that the other systems are often too debilitated to bear the loss

of support they would suffer from a reduction of the excitement of the arteries; that the bark suspends the action of the irritant that continues disease or translates the latter to a part less capable of being fatally acted on; if this reasoning be objected to; I have only to appeal to the opinions and experience of physicians; and there are few I suppose who would not attribute generally these consequences of fever to some neglect as to the quantity or times of administering the bark — The mischiefs resulting from too great a reliance

on the pulse is taken notice of by Lind in his treatise on Hot climates. The inexperienced disciples of Sydenham and those who have read authors that treat of inflammatory diseases only, he advises, in hot climates, to abstain from the use of the Lancet entirely and to trust to other remedies. For this very imperfect essay I have several apologies to offer; the want of accuracy and minuteness in writers in their relation of symptoms, especially that of the pulse; the incompetency of a student to treat a medical subject; and above all a requisition of the University

which is a sufficient excuse for the failure of an attempt that ~~c~~ has received no aid from a feeling of confidence in the writer, or if it have any merit, owes it to the learning and abilities of those properly who have endeavoured to inculcate in their pupils sound principles of medicine ——